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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

30 November 1948

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 90

SUBJECT: Ability of the Communist Party of Guadeloupe to Disrupt the West Indian Conference.

US vice-consul Bartelt in Martinique reports that a "metropolitan Communist" agitator recently arrived at Guadeloupe and is planning by means of mass strikes and demonstrations during its course to disrupt the West Indian Conference which begins 30 November, and to which the US is sending delegates. This is the third in a series of meetings held under the sponsorship of the Caribbean Commission (Ward Canaday, US co-Chairman) primarily to consider the industrial development and economic productivity of colonial possessions in the Caribbean area. The Prefect of Guadeloupe shares vice-consul Bartelt's apprehensions, and has had ordered to Guadeloupe within sight of the meeting place of the conference an old French cruiser (6500 tons, eight 6.1 inch, four 3 inch, six 40 mm., and twenty 20 mm. guns) and a sub-chaser. Vice-consul Bartelt has expressed the opinion that there is thus no need to fear for the "personal security" of the US delegation as a consequence of possible Communist demonstrations. Despite these precautions, however, CIA estimates that Communist-inspired demonstrations might occur. Although they would not be likely to jeopardize the security of the US delegates they could by forcing the postponement or removal of the meetings impair the prestige of the Conference and, indirectly, that of the US.

The Communist Party of Guadeloupe is fully capable of creating disorders among the native populace. The party is ably led, well disciplined, and amply supplied with funds. In the 1946 general elections, the Communists polled 45 percent of the total vote: two of the three deputies in Paris from Guadeloupe are Communists. The trade unions are largely controlled by Communists who engineered a general strike in 1947. In 1946 the Communists effected the substitution of apathetic native black garrison troops for assuredly loyal Senegalese.

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Communist strength on Guadeloupe developed subsequent to the overthrow of Vichy control of the island in 1943, and since that time has competed with Socialist influence for political control. Over 95 percent of the population is black, and the Communists have attracted many adherents among them by the frank use of racial conflict in propaganda. In order to promote anti-US feeling, they have made skillful use of "evidence" of the alleged subordination of Negroes in the US in contrast to the egalitarian treatment of racial minorities in the USSR. The Communists have tended to impute aggressive designs to the US against the French West Indies and have further pictured the Caribbean Commission as US-dominated and as a possible instrument for the expansion of US influence in the Caribbean. Thus it would not be difficult for the Communists to generate hostile feeling among the natives against the 30 November Conference. The situation is rendered even more opportune for Communist-inspired disturbances by the fact that mass demonstrations celebrating the centenary of the abolition of slavery in French territories have been scheduled to coincide with the meeting of the Conference.

In the face of a serious Communist-inspired attempt to discredit the West Indian Conference, the island's military and police establishments would be inadequate. There are only about one hundred policemen on the island, and many of them are afraid to act forcibly against the natives for fear of reprisal against their families. The one and only company of troops is inexperienced and untrustworthy.

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